

This Week In Agriculture

August 21-27, 2005

Iris Yellow Spot Virus threatens Idaho onion fields

A thrips-transmitted disease first identified in onions 16 years ago by University of Idaho plant pathologist Krishna Mohan is exploding this year in Treasure Valley onion fields.

"Any plant stress aggravates the problem," says Mohan of iris yellow spot virus, which has infected onion seed crops in the Treasure Valley to varying degrees since 1989 and commercial onion bulb crops since 2001. "Any situation that favors the buildup of onion thrips also increases the symptoms."

Lynn Jensen, Oregon State University's Extension educator in Malheur County, says the disease has been "showing up fairly extensively throughout the whole valley" since late July. He believes the crop's health was compromised by early-season rains, which left fields so wet that necessary spring-time farming activities compacted the soil. That compaction is now interfering with the onion roots' ability to take up critical moisture, increasing the crop's vulnerability to plant diseases.



Top: An infected seedling. At left: Yellow spot virus on an onion plant.

Populations of the culprit insect are also unusually high, which Jensen suspects is weather-related as well. "We've had more thrips than we've seen in many, many years and they've been almost impossible to control," he says.

Iris yellow spot virus-also found in irises in other countries but not yet in the U.S.-can render onion seed fields unharvestable. Infected flower stalks die and fall over, leaving "a whole tangled mass," says Mohan.

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Sculpture salutes the Idaho County farmer



A farmer stands tall, greeting travelers on Old U.S. Highway 7 toward Nezperce. Idaho County Free Press reporter Lorie Palmer reports on the sculpture's creation in a recent edition. Palmer quotes the monument's creator, Don Tacke, of the Greencreek/Cottonwood area.

"I wanted something that pays tribute to the Idaho County farmer, so that's who it's dedicated to," Tacke is quoted as saying. "About 20 or 25 years ago when they rebuilt Highway 7, they didn't have anywhere to place the excavation," Tacke told Palmer.

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"I said they can put it there since the ground right there is rocky and not good for anything to be grown on." Palmer says the Tacke family began calling the excavation "the monument."

"Now we really have a monument," Tacke told the newspaper. Tacke's brother-in-law, Maurus Uhlhorn of Ferdinand, made the metal farmer.

The newspaper says there's about 500 pounds of scrap metal in the farmer, who sits on a combine wheel base, adding another 500 pounds. That makes it



unlikely the farmer will tip over.

The farmer is wearing a John Deere hat at the moment, but Tacke said Uhlhorn also built a cowboy hat for the sculpture, "so he'll be getting a change now and then."

Thank you to the Idaho County Free Press and reporter Lorie Palmer for sharing the photos and story with the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

Onions (continued from page 1)

In commercial onions, the disease decreases bulb size and slashes the percentage of the crop that qualifies for the "colossal" grade.

"Our onion trade is mostly based on the size of the bulb," says Mohan. "This disease affects the size, and that in turn affects the marketable yield."

Jerry Neufeld, UI Extension educator in Canyon County, says iris yellow spot can be "pretty devastating."

Neufeld warns area growers of its presence through the Web-based service <http://www.tvpestalert.net> or <http://www.pnwpestalert.net>. Indeed, iris yellow spot virus and onion thrips were recently ranked the No. 1 and No. 3 research priorities, respectively, for dry bulb storage onions in the West by developers of a pest-management strategic plan for that crop.

Since Mohan first reported the disease in the valley's onions in 1989, it has been identified in onion-growing areas throughout the West and, last year, even in

Georgia.

"Every time I present this at a national onion conference, people say, 'Oh, I have seen this,'" says Mohan. "I think it has been here for quite some time."

According to Mohan, iris yellow spot virus is characterized by distinctive-"almost artistic"-tan or straw-colored diamond-shaped lesions on the flower stalks of biennial onion seed crops and by elongated dry lesions or flecks on the leaves of annual bulb crops.

No chemical treatments are available to curtail the disease, although a number of insecticides are labeled for onion thrips control.

In addition to keeping a lid on thrips populations, the valley's onion growers have been advised to promote crop vigor through good fertilizer and water management, to control volunteer and wild members of the onion family, to destroy cull onions and to plant varieties less susceptible to thrips.

At OSU's Malheur Experiment Station each growing season,

Why do onions make you cry?

When you slice through an onion, you break open a number of onion cells containing enzymes. The escape of the enzymes breaks down the sulfides in the onion, generating sulfenic acid. Sulfenic acid is unstable and quickly breaks down into a gas that travels through the air and to your eye.

Mohan and Jensen make systematic observations of onion variety trials, rating varieties for the severity of iris yellow spot virus symptoms.

No varieties are resistant, but Mohan says these annual disease evaluations "may help us gain some insight into the relative susceptibility of varieties and give us some initial advantage in recommending less susceptible varieties for future planting."

The Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association (PNDSA) will host a special two-day farm tour of both irrigated and dryland direct seed operations for southern Idaho and eastern Oregon growers, agency personnel and other interested individuals on September 20-21.

The tour will travel from Boise to Pendleton and Enterprise, Oregon, with an overnight stay at the Wildhorse Resort at Pendleton.

Direct seeding practices can help growers save money on both fuel and water, generating more overall farm profits while improving soil quality, enhancing fish and wildlife habitats, and

preventing wind and water erosion. In addition, direct seeding can be a major qualifying factor for payments under the Conservation Security Program (CSP).

The tour will visit farming operations that have successfully implemented and perfected direct seed cropping systems — some in continual direct seeding for more than 20 years.

Speakers will cover a variety of topics with emphasis on techniques, implementation, equipment, soil quality, and environ-

The PNDSA invites anyone who is interested in direct seeding to attend this event. Pre-registration is required by September 15. For more information contact the PNDSA at (208) 883-3645 or info@directseed.org.

mental benefits.

Experienced direct seeders, university researchers, Soil and Water Conservation District personnel and EPA speakers are all included on the agenda. Funding for the tour is provided by the Environmental Protection Agency. Tour participants will pay \$50 each, which will include lodging, transportation, and most meals.

CRP contracts may be eligible for one-year extensions

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts expiring this year may be eligible for one-year extensions, announced Wayne Hammon, state director of the Idaho Farm Service Agency (FSA). "The extension option applies only to CRP participants with contracts scheduled to expire on September 30, 2005, and only if this extension does not push the original rental-payment contract beyond the 15 year mark." The deadline to apply for this extension is September 2, 2005.

Hammon added, "Idaho currently has 793,649 environmentally sensitive acres enrolled in CRP, of which approximately 3,204 acres are covered under contracts scheduled to expire this year." Producers enrolled in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers to improve the quality of water, control soil ero-

sion, and enhance wildlife habitat.

FSA will notify eligible CRP participants of their option to modify and extend their CRP contracts.

The extension will not change participants' rental rates. All or a portion of the acreage under contract may be included in an extension, but no new acreage may be added. All existing requirements under the original contract will continue to apply to contracts that are modified and extended.

Although no general CRP signup opportunity is scheduled this year, interested producers may continue to enroll relatively small, highly desirable acres such as filter strips and riparian buffers in the continuous CRP at any time at their local FSA

county office.

All interested producers with contracts expiring on September 30, 2005, are encouraged to contact their county FSA office for more details.

All requests for extension must be filed by September 2, 2005.

You can read past issues of This Week in Agriculture and learn more about the Idaho State Department of Agriculture at <http://www.idahoag.us>.

Crapo teams with Arkansas' Lincoln for ESA reforms

A bipartisan effort to update and strengthen the Endangered Species Act (ESA) takes a large step forward with assistance from U.S. Senators Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) and Blanche Lincoln (D-Arkansas).

Crapo and Lincoln have partnered to write legislation that will address several areas of the ESA. Crapo and Lincoln are co-chairing a working group in Congress that is coordinating its efforts with the appropriate committees of jurisdiction in the Senate and U.S. House of Representatives.

In February, Crapo joined Senator Lincoln Chafee (R-

Rhode Island), who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Water; Representative Richard Pombo (R-California), who chairs the House Resources Committee, and Representative Greg Walden (R-Oregon) to announce a bicameral effort directed at the same goal.

Crapo, who has already gathered several Republican supporters, said, "Congress has been examining the ESA for ten years and is ready for a breakthrough that maintains protections and improves recovery for species.

"This can only be done

with commitments from all parties involved; collaboration and cooperation are essential for this effort to be successful. I am pleased that Senator Lincoln has joined with me in this effort.

"We will continue to seek partnerships with other Senators and Congressmen who share the principles that are directing our legislative efforts. I am committed to resolving long-standing issues with ESA so the law works better for species and for people."

"In looking at the ESA and the issues surrounding it, I am convinced that it can be improved," Lincoln said.

What's ahead in ISDA's marketing division

August 27: Idaho Preferred™ - in conjunction with Clear Channel Communications, Albertsons, Buy Idaho and Sysco of Idaho - will host the "Taste of Idaho" on August 27, 2005 at the Boise Centre on the Grove.

It will be a culinary event showcasing the diversity of Idaho's food and agricultural industry.

Idaho residents will be able to sample fresh fruits and vegetables, delicious jams, jellies and pickles, great breads, organic meats and premium wines.

Cooking demonstrations, featuring a variety of Idaho products from trout to fresh herbs and unique specialty foods will take place throughout the day on four different stages.

A special room just for kids will be hosted by United Dairy-men of Idaho.

September 11-17: The Idaho State Dept. of Agriculture, in conjunction with WUSATA, will be conducting a trade mission to Central America. The mission will include an out bound trade mission to Costa Rica and Guatemala and an in-store promotion campaign for the products purchased by the buyers.

September 12-16: Idaho Preferred™ and the Meridian School District will be featuring fresh fruits from local Idaho producers on school lunch menus in traditional schools in the Meridian District.

September 19-Oct 17: The Idaho State Department of Agriculture, in conjunction with the California and Utah Departments of Agriculture and WUSATA, will be coordinating a month-long retail promotion of Western fresh produce in Central America.

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